

1. Describe the practice proposed for recognition, and list its objectives. Detail how the practice is innovative and how it promotes high student achievement.

Speak to Me Bear, I'm Listening is a practice that was designed to expand expressive language among disabled preschool students and to reinforce basic concepts and readiness skills. This innovative project effectively combines strategies for promoting language development with the innovative use of technology.

Twenty-four students, ages three to six have been involved in this project. Many of these children have limited language skills and they rely on a sign system in combination with oral language. This project has encouraged students to begin to use language more fluently to express basic needs and desires. Concurrently, our children have met other children and adults who live outside the scope of our district who differ in abilities, backgrounds and cultures yet share common feelings and experiences. They have also visited new places that were normally beyond the scope of our rural community.

The project begins when the special education teacher brought in several stuffed animals for the children to manipulate and identify. As a group, the children selected their favorite stuffed animal and named it. The children were told that their new friend would help them go to new places and to meet new friends. The children selected a bear and they named him "Happy."

Once the animal was selected, the teacher removed the stitching from the bear's arms and attached only enough of the arms so that it remained attached to its body. Sewing elastic to the ends of his arms where an opening was created, the teacher then could place her hands into the bear's arms and poke her hands through the opening to create a signing bear. Using gloves, the children became mesmerized with their "talking" friend.

Happy helped the children to identify body parts on him and as a group, the children reviewed articles of clothing. The children learned new signs and Happy cheered every time the children uttered new sounds or attempted the approximation of a word or words. Together, the children selected an outfit for Happy. Once the bear was dressed and ready to go, the teacher took the bear and her children on a tour of the town. The school bus passed many interesting sites within our town as we participated in field trips around our community. The children talked about the many sites they saw and photographs and videos were taken of Happy and the children. These images were taken to encourage recall back in the classroom and for the teacher to create a slide show of things to see in our town with taped verbalizations from the students. This special video clip depicting our town through the eyes of young children was packaged in a suitcase our bear has. Happy and his suitcase travel to see new sites and new friends outside the boundary of our town and he shares his special visits through our computer.

As part of the curriculum that investigates community helpers, the bear has been sent out to visit various work sites in our community and he communicates back to us via e-mail and video conferencing his experiences while staying at the various job sites. Prearranged "bear assistants" who are enthusiastic professionals and employees from prearranged work sites have assisted the bear in communicating back to the students. They have communicated information regarding the operations and challenges at the work sites. Through this interaction, the children have begun using problem-solving activities to help the bear solve some of the work site problems.

Happy has also visited locations that have been fearful to our students. The bear visited an area hospital and reported back to the children what it was like inside an emergency room and how our friends at this location dress in different clothes and wear masks that hide their nose and mouth.

As this project continues to expand and grow and Happy continues to set his eyes on new destinations, a home page on the Internet is presently being considered to invite other schools to share their experiences by hosting Happy at their particular school site. Our students will send the bear as the District's Ambassador to selected schools in different geographic regions of the country and world and will share our students' video about life in our town. Using e-mail and video conferencing, the bear will telecommunicate back to us his experiences. The bear's experiences "living" away from his home school will become a vehicle through which participating schools will share experiences and discover that people of different abilities, backgrounds and cultures all share common feelings. Having students in distant schools help the bear to communicate back home will help all students see life through each other's eyes.

Throughout this project, student interest and motivation to speak has increased dramatically. They are motivated to speak so Happy can hear them. The children have begun to realize that our world extends beyond the boundaries of our town and that our classroom is larger than the space within the four walls. The curriculum objectives this project supports include:

- \*The child will use gestures, sounds, words, or sentences (including sign language and augmentative and alternative communication) to convey wants and needs or to express meaning to others.
- \*The child responds to others' communication with appropriate gestures, sounds, words, or word combinations (including sign language and augmentative and alternative communication).
- \*The child will use gestures, sounds, words, or sentences (including sign language and augmentative and alternative communication) to initiate, respond to, or maintain reciprocal interactions with others.
- \* The student will increase receptive and expressive language skills through the use of computers and augmentative communication devices to encourage spontaneous language among disabled youngsters.
- \* The student will increase eye contact and sustained attention to tasks when working with the teacher, buddy or computer images. The students will learn to focus onto the speaker who may need to rely on sign language as an effective communication tool.
- \* The student will increase awareness of community helpers and how they serve our particular community.
- \* The student will gain an awareness that people all share common feelings.
- \* The students will observe and participate in telecommunications to interact with students in remote settings.
- \* The students will increase an awareness of various careers and problems posed while visiting the various sites (i.e., During the bear's visit to M&M Mars Corporation, the students will analyze the proportion of the different colors of M&M candies in a regular sized bag).
- \* The students will explore the use of interactive video as an effective means to visit sites or people in distant locations.

2. List the specific Core Curriculum Content Standards, including the Cross-Content Workplace Readiness Standards,\* addressed by the practice and describe how the practice addresses those standard(s), Provide an example to substantiate your response.

Alignment of the Early Childhood Education Program Expectations: Standards of Quality with the Core Curriculum Content standards (CCCS) and the District Curriculum.

Early Childhood Education Program Expectations: Standards of Quality	CCCS	How <u>Speak to Me Bear</u> Project Meets Expectation
All children will develop self-confidence and self esteem.	1.0	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Photos and video clips will be taken of the students.</li> <li>❖ Families are regularly invited to join class and participate in this practice.</li> <li>❖ Children are praised regularly and appropriately.</li> </ul>
Experience at least one language other than English.	7.1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Children practice sign language.</li> <li>❖ Integrate sign language throughout the curriculum.</li> <li>❖ As Happy visits other schools in remote areas, the children learn to initiate simple greetings in other languages.</li> </ul>
Develop community and career awareness.	6.4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Children visit various community sites through field trips while bringing our bear.</li> <li>❖ With the bear, the children participate in “what they would like to be when they grow up” activities.</li> </ul>
Develop self-awareness and interpersonal relationship skills.	6.1 6.2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Children compare and discuss similarities and differences in other children.</li> <li>❖ Develop and practice greetings</li> </ul>
Make simple predictions of experimental outcomes.	5.2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Children participate in making predictions and observations.</li> <li>❖ Teachers ask children open-ended questions and give experimental opportunities (cause/effect).</li> </ul>
Explore numeration.	4.6 4.8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Children use props to assist with beginning counting skills to help the bear with problems he meets at distant sites.</li> <li>❖ Provide 1-1 correspondence</li> </ul>

		activities (count m&m's).
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3. Describe the educational needs of students that the practice addresses. Document the assessment measures used to determine the extent to which the objectives of the practice have been met. Provide assessments and data to show how the practice met these needs.

Students who have participated in this practice are young children who have been identified as preschool disabled. Many have significant delays in the communication domain and need specialized teaching strategies as stated in each child's I.E.P. Students who are involved in this practice are taught through a total communication program. The children are encouraged to use sign language as an assistive device in combination with expressive language. In addition, many of the students are diagnosed with Down syndrome, autism, PDD, FAS, visual impairments and spina bifida. The following have been assessment techniques that have been used to evaluate the effectiveness of the project:

- ❖ Pre and post language samples have been taken on all children involved in this practice to determine gains achieved through participation in this practice. These samples have been compared against similar students who did not participate. The results indicate a gain of 15% overall in word utterances.
- ❖ Pre and post assessment of sign language usage and understanding of functional signs were gathered. Results yielded and overall understanding of functional signs up by 25% yet actual usage of the signs decreased by 30%. The special education teacher interprets this data to be reflective of the students increase in expressive language and therefore less assistance in needed with sign to get their messages across to the listener. The sign language had become an effective, short-term aid to encourage the children to express their needs.
- ❖ On-going assessments of basic understanding of general concepts have been explored with the students to see if basic concepts could be mastered. A concept development tool was designed to see if children could move from a concrete awareness to a more abstract understanding of basic concepts. Results yielded all students have made incremental growth from concrete to abstract representation of basic concepts.

4. Describe how you would replicate the practice in another school and/or district.

It is the intent of this teacher to create a resource book for interested professionals to use that would provide the necessary information to replicate such a practice. The resource book would provide ways to sponsor "Happy" in their school setting as well as specific information regarding the start-up of another animal to begin his/her quest. This manual would pose the idea of the creation of a worldwide zoo of many animals, all different in appearance and the focus different depending upon the needs of the student. This manual would contain several of the assessment tools designed by the teacher as well as potential funding sources to secure the necessary hardware.